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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that licensing or certification have not been an effective method of supervising or insuring quality of family day care, the largest form of out-of-home, non-relative care of children, this paper describes an alternative way of building more developmental care into family day care homes. The growth and progress of WATCH (Women Attentive to Children's Happiness), an organization of family day care mothers, is discussed from the point of view of the professional supports necessary to build leadership into the group. These mothers organized into groups in order to meet their own needs, to improve their image in the community and to provide an arena for them to exchange practical solutions to common and unique problems. By making an invisible network of women who informally care for children visible to themselves and their community, it becomes possible for the group to deal with issues relevant to developmental care. (Author)

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A SELF-HELP ORGANIZATION OF FAMILY DAY CARE MOTHERS AS A MEANS OF QUALITY CONTROL*

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Many day care professionals have dismissed family day care, as it exists today, as a viable alternative of delivering child development services because of the difficulty of guaranteeing quality control. However, a self-help organization of family day care mothers has the ingredients necessary to provide an effective method of working toward developmental programs for children and their families using this service. This form of out-of-home, non-relative child care is usually invisible, informal, largely unlicensed and provides almost 80% of the services to families and child in need of this type of program.[1,3,4,5,6] Because family day care is a neighborhood phenomenon and often is an informal arrangement made between friends and neighbors, it defies institutional monitoring and control (where it exists in a natural setting). It gains a good deal of its strength because it attracts women who are not paper pushers, or products of some of the *don't touch children* schools of education. This is not to say that this form of care doesn't need support, improvement and education; rather, it is to say that the traditional forms of supervision and evaluation do not work toward this end. Although the initial thrust of an organization of family day care mothers may not be the improvement of children's programs, the end result may be just that. In the Pasadena, California, area, the outcome of a group of family day care mothers working together has been increased visibility and improved child care. This paper will describe a self-help organization of family day care mothers, WATCH (Women Attentive to Children's Happiness) which has succeeded in (1) helping family day care mothers and the community recognize the importance of the children's services offered; (2) providing opportunities to learn techniques and methods of child rearing from each other, as well as from trained personnel; and (3) initiating cooperative support systems to better their lives and those of the children in their care.

History of WATCH

WATCH was conceived when the staff of the Community Family Day Care Project (funded by the Office of Child Development Demonstration Project OCD-CB-10) prepared for the Demonstration's termination. As happens in most federally funded programs, there was a year-to-year funding crisis that was put to rest after two and one half years of support from OCD. We planned for our demise, then, almost as soon as we were funded. The Community Family Day Care Project was initiated in August 1970 by Pacific Oaks College in order to examine family day care and its potential for delivering developmental services for young

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children. What we found, we liked.[6,7,8] We as a staff also found ourselves becoming family day care advocates, not objective researchers but defenders of women who were providing services that in no way reflected the pitifully small monetary rewards they were receiving. At professional meetings, project staff were always defending the kind of care provided by Pasadena family day care mothers and it was as if we were talking about *special* women who had been *creamed* from an unusual community. Usually those who questioned us had never been inside a family day care home and expected a family day care mother to be the *old woman who lived in the shoe* who tied children to bed-posts, forced an extraordinary amount of TV on the children, *gave them some broth without any bread, and spanked them all soundly and sent them to bed.* This was not what we found or wrote about. As we traveled, communicated with and met family day care mothers in other communities, we became more convinced that women like the women with whom we worked might be found in any neighborhood. It became clear to us that the family day care mothers themselves could best dispel the myths spread about them. They had to become more visible.

The Community Family Day Care Project provided the opportunity for bringing small groups of family day care mothers together for the purpose of discussing strengths and weaknesses of this type of child care. The act of bringing 5 or 6 women together in the Project office resulted in other informal get-togethers, pooling of resources, exchanging of equipment, helping with vacation times and lots of telephone calls outside the program. During this time, the staff and Pacific Oaks students observed an improvement in the self-image of the women and the quality of programs offered parents and their children. Indeed, the family day care mothers wanted more than their own small group meeting; they wanted the opportunity to meet the total membership of the Project, to meet as a whole. They wanted to compare notes, find more friends, assist each other and learn ways of coping with common problem situations. The staff quickly recognized that the women themselves could and would often provide assistance most needed to improve the quality of life for themselves and those in their care.

By the time the Project had been six months under way, the family day care mothers asked for assistance in planning and establishing an organization to meet their needs. This was the outcome of bringing the total group of 22 Project members together to discuss the issues of a renewal application to OCD. The Project staff took steps to develop a climate in which an organization of family day care mothers could emerge:

-circulation of membership lists, as well as biographies of Project family day care mothers being published in a monthly bulletin

-a pilot class offered by Pacific Oaks College developed for family day care mothers

-social get-togethers where family day care mothers could begin to know each other in a relaxed and informal setting

-home visits by staff members to talk about the possible implications of forming an organization.

Meanwhile the staff grappled with another concern. We knew from previous experience that the ongoing support and guidance of a trusted organizer was a requirement for the making of an enduring organization. Since the Project had a limited life and paid staff would not be available, three staff members agreed to volunteer the needed assistance to encourage the growth of the organization when funding was stopped.

Therefore the staff assumed a variety of roles during the evolutionary process of the self-help organization. For purposes of clarity, this paper will describe the hisotyr of the organization in two separate parts (although there were many overlaps) -- during the life of the Community Family Day Care Project and after the termination of the Project.

During Project

The conceptual framework upon which the organization was based is well stated by Stinchcomb[9] when he points out that the fundamental problems in starting new organizations are to concentrate sufficient resources in the hands of leadership and to recruit, train, motivate and organize personnel into a structure that will function more or less continuously. The staff assumed the task of providing the setting for individual family day care mothers to reveal their strengths and expertise so that leadership would evolve and grow. Further, we attempted to help the women set achievable, concrete short term and long range goals. (The family day care mothers and staff obtained invaluable insight and assistance from Paula Menkin* and Warren Haggstrom**[2] in examining, establishing and implementing our plans.)

During the last six months of the Community Family Day Care Project, a staff member was hired for the express purpose of helping the fledgling organization become independent and strong. It must be said here that trying to telescope plans and action into a set time-table was impractical -- helping to form and build an organization takes time and patience. (We had the latter, but not the former.)

The first meetings of the organization that were held were staff-controlled in the sense that family day care mothers were assisted by strong directions from staff members. The staff convened the first meetings, suggested agendas, helped to focus on the goals for the organization. Family day care mother leadership emerged, and it was apparent their fine sense of humor and common-sense approach to problem solving would work toward organizational endurance. The original framework which was suggested by the 17 women who attended the first meetings was a loosely structured executive committee that provided for revolving responsibility for chairing and conducting meetings and business. After four meetings, the family day care mothers found this unworkable and wanted a more traditional, year-to-year officer-type organization with a constitution, by-laws, dues and an identity.

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The staff assisted in making available a number of different constitutions from a variety of other associations and eventually a simple document was composed for the membership to vote upon. It was unanimously passed by the 24 members that had by then been drawn to the group. An organizational name was important; the women wanted to be known by a positive, descriptive name. They chose WATCH (Women Attentive to Children's Happiness) from a group of names submitted by members and one family day care mother sketched a baby in diapers that became the emblem for stationary and future bulletins.

Other supports were provided by staff in order to help build WATCH.

-A bulletin that had been produced by the Project was turned over to WATCH; a family day care mother eidotr was chosen by the members and our staff helped with paper, use of a typewriter, mimeographing at Pacific Oaks College and the technical process of gathering together information, writing it up, putting it onto a stencil and then mailing the bulletin.

-The Project toy loan was turned over to WATCH to administer with the assitance of staff.

-A place to meet was provided by Pacific Oaks College. This was to be an ongoing commitment by the College in spite of space problems.

-Cooperative buying was attempted, but the logistics were so difficult that it was given up. Instead, one staff member concentrated on finding stores that carried products of interest to WATCH members and that would give discounts to members of WATCH.

-A no-interest loan fund that had been administered by the Project for the purpose of making environmental improvements for family day care homes was turned over to WATCH.

-The beginning of a back-up co-op was formed. This consisted of identifying women who could "back-up" family day care mothers who became ill, went on vacation or just plain needed a day off.

-The Project had been acting as an information service to large numbers of parents who were in need of child care. WATCH found this service particularly useful to its members and wanted to continue it after the Project closed. This took careful planning and the hiring of a person who could take phone calls, give information and be generally available to parents. Money was raised so that an ad could be placed in the Yellow pages; a woman was hired by a WATCH committee; the Project phone listing was changed to WATCH and, by the time of closing, all calls to the Project were switched to the WATCH Information Service.

-A phone tree was initiated so that the women could communicate with each other quickly.

The most important support given by staff was assistance in learning how to work in committees, to work toward achievable goals. Staff members attended all executive and committee meetings to lend what expertise was necessary. As the Project came to a close, less and less help was asked for or needed.

After the Termination of the Community Family Day Care Project

Upon termination of the Project, the staff members scattered to new jobs. Three of the original group continued their work at Pacific Oaks and were available for continued participation in WATCH on a different and time-limited basis. Our roles changed in some respects and stayed the same in others. We still represented the College and the government to some extent and we found that put us into the role of *experts* and *the enemy* at different times. For example, on a given issue our opinion was asked but our advice was rejected -- not on the basis of merit, but rather in a show of independence. This was now the organization of WATCH members and was no longer an extension of the Project; this brought forth both pride and anger.

Staff members were sometimes considered *models* since it seemed we had more organizational experience than most family day care mothers although, as the organization has progressed, there is little modeling that is necessary. We have served as *guides* and *gatekeepers* in understanding the terrain of the community and opening some of the doors that help to strengthen the organization. Most of all, we are now listeners, participants, members and even an officer of WATCH. (One of the shyest and least pushy members of the staff was elected vice-president of WATCH at its most recent election. Interestingly, she is the only Project member who is an elected officer.)

WATCH members continue to publish the monthly bulletin. (It has been requested by groups all over the country.) An electric typewriter was purchased, after a fund-raising project, in order to make the cutting of a stencil a bit easier; Pacific Oaks still provides the use of their mimeographing machine. The toy loan has continued, but it is limping along; the problems of breakage and over-use by some members has become a point of concern at meetings. The phone tree operates efficiently, as does the back-up co-op and no-interest loan fund. The information service handles many calls each day and one person has managed the coordination since it began. Problems have arisen, but they are seemingly easily handled by an information service committee. WATCH continues to meet at Pacific Oaks on the second Monday of each month.

Accomplishments of WATCH

The accomplishments of WATCH are many considering its two and one half years of existence. The membership has grown to 53 paid members including 21 members of the original Community Family Day Care Project; average meeting attendance is 25. WATCH has served to make family day care a visible alternative to center care of children in the Los Angeles area.

WATCH members have participated in several day care conferences. They are vibrant, articulate and marvelous salespersons for family day care. In fact, one family day care mother participated in a panel at the Galveston Orthopsychiatric meeting held in 1972. The president of WATCH has been asked to serve as a vice-president of the Pasadena Child Care Consortium; members have been asked to serve as consultatns to a newly formed group of family day care mothers in a nearby community; they have been asked to testify as experts before the Monrovia City

Council when licensing was discussed. In addition, WATCH has signed a letter of intent in order to participate in a Dubnoff Center for Child Development and Educational Therapy proposal to help with early identification of vulnerable childr[illegible].

WATCH members have been on several local TV and radio shows as well as featured in newspaper stories.

As a group, WATCH members have written two position papers--both in response to direct problems that they have squarely faced. The first paper, *What Is Quality Family Day Care*, was in response to a number of criticisms of family day care that have been carried by the media. Members were especially confounded by the *WINDOWS ON DAY CARE* booklet published by the Council of Jewish Women. The picture of family day care described by Mary Keyserling was not the programs the women knew, although they were aware that it was possible to find homes where children were mistreated or lacked the kind of attention they needed. WATCH, in a sense, was the answer to this attack and members decided that they needed to put into words what they felt quality family day care is and should be. The paper starts

> *Quality family day care is the open arms, heart and mind of a mother substitute who cares for the young child whose parents are gone part of the day on a regular basis. It is loving and being loved in a family situation beyond his own; it is having his siblings with him as he would in his own home. It is exploring and molding new relationships with 'day brothers and sisters', with relatives and friends of the day care mother, and with children in her neighborhood.*

The paper goes on to outline the components and standards for a developmental and individualized program for children of all ages. This lovely paper was edited by Pam Hasegawa after extensive meetings and discussions with many WATCH members.

The second position paper was on the subject of discipline. The need for the paper arose from a situation in which a parent claimed that her toddler had been mistreated by a family day care mother, who was a new member of WATCH. After a thorough investigation, it was impossible to determine what the *true* story was: on the one hand there was a distraught pregnant mother who had not told her husband of her need to place their child in some form of care for a few hours a day because she was overtired and very nervous over the impending birth of her second child. On the other side was a family day care mother with little experience in caring for another person's child and who claimed that she had talked to the pregnant mother about the inappropriate way the child was being punished in his own home and being brought to the family day care home in a bruised condition. The problem was raised at a meeting of WATCH and several actions resulted. The new family day care mother was visited but, because of the incident, she stopped caring for children in her home and withdrew her application for a license. A follow-up visit was made to the pregnant mother by staff members in order to see if another home could be found for her child. It was also decided that a paper on discipline should be written that would state WATCH's position and that would be given to each new member of the organization. The first draft of the paper, which was written by a committee of four, was a self-defense document. It described what should be done if a child is brought to a home in a mistreated or bruised condition. In addition, there was a short paragraph on not using cruel and inhumane punishment on children. The information was useful but upon my urging it was decided that a

more in-depth exploration of discipline should be written. The final paper was written by a committee and approved by the membership. It takes a common-sense, humanistic and positive attitude of working toward self-discipline, with as little emphasis on punishment as possible.

A packet consisting of both position papers and other informative materials is made available to each member of WATCH. This includes information concerning safety and emergency treatment and tax data as well as the constitution and by-laws and a list of equipment that is available through the toy loan.

Another spin-off of the discipline crisis was that the back-up co-op was re-emphasized. Family day care mothers agreed that every person who cares for children has a limit in patience and kindness at some time. Should a family day care mother feel that she is reaching that point, she now feels free to call a neighboring member to talk, perhaps visit, or arrange for the care of her children by another member in order to have a few hours of time alone.

Pacific Oaks has continued to offer extension courses that can culminate in a family day care certificate for members of WATCH. Attendance has been less than spectacular since the closing of the Project, but not from lack of interest. We have been told that evening meetings are tough after a 10-hour day and we can appreciate that. Daytime courses are difficult to attend because of the need for a substitute to care for the children. This semester we plan to offer a week-end workshop. Family day care mothers tell us that this will fit their time constraints best ... we will see. In spite of the difficulties, six family day care mothers have received their family day care certificates and three more will complete the requirements next semester.

The content of WATCH meetings vary each month, with an emphasis on business one month and educational and informational discussions the next. The business meetings provide a time for the standing and ad hoc committees to do the work they have established for themselves and to report to the membership on their progress. The educational meetings have diversity with guest speakers such as an attorney speaking about legal responsibilities of day care, an accountant discussing tax problems of day care families, a nutritionist helping to plan good diets for children and adults, a pediatrician exploring child development, and a number of workshops conducted by family day care mothers who have special talents and expertise in such areas as crafts or working with babies or how to present science experience in a home setting.

There are several givens when a member attends a WATCH meeting: (1) it is informative; (2) it is always pleasing to the palate since there is a selection of weight watcher fruits and homemade goodies served; (3) it is always good fun and laughter; and (4) if there is a day care problem with a child or a parent, there are opportunities for discussion and problem solving.

Problems

One of the perpetual problems that almost any organization faces is that there are *doers*, *non-doers* and *un-doers*. WATCH is no exception. Our staff members still worry about the building of an elite group, leaving the least articulate out of

decision making and perhaps losing those members who most benefit from working together as a group. The membership presently represents widely divergent age grouping, cultural background and socio-economic status. We feel guilty about the little time we spend in helping to encourage the shy and withdrawn women who need a bit of assistance in bringing out ideas that are practical and good. Our good intentions of last year to provide ongoing support to the organization often get lost in here-and-now stresses of our daily jobs.

There has been considerable pressure from without, and at times from within, that all members of WATCH should be licensed family day care mothers. We know that there are few unlicensed members (most have gone through the licensing process since they have joined WATCH), but the importance of keeping the group open to anyone who wants to join (even staff members) is a point of contention that seems to crop up often. There are those who feel that licensing guarantees quality; there are those who know it does not. Staff members know most of the members; programs and, often, standards and quality are in the mind of the beholder. Time and again, the point is made that the purpose of WATCH is to provide quality care for children by including rather than excluding all of those interested in achieving this end. We are not sure what will happen to this issue, but it does raise another important point for consideration.

The organizers of an association generally have their own ax to grind. Coming from an educational institution, our axes had to do with providing *education* for all who are concerned with the care of children in their homes. We knew that there are probably twice as many unlicensed as licensed family day care homes, and in our experience it made no difference as to quality if the home were licensed or not ... good and bad may be found in either case. We have been communicating with other family day care organizations around the country and have noted that those organized through welfare departments have a different approach. They draw from licensed family day care and exclude the unlicensed women. That is not to say that there is not a need for both apporaches; they are simply different and should be considered.

Another problem has arisen from the fact that some family day care mothers have joined WATCH with the idea that they will receive an unlimited number of referrals from the information service. When this doesn't happen, they are angry. Of the 53 members there seem to be five or six who do not want to attend meetings and do not participate in the group meetings. Some members of WATCH want to return their membership dues and read them out of the organization; the majority are attempting to interest them in attending at least one meeting in the hope that they will become interested and participate in the growth of WATCH.

Conclusion

In describing the growth and development of WATCH, the common sense approach of family day care mothers comes forth again and again. An organization was formed that meets the unique needs of women who care for children. They work all day and have night meetings low on their priority list, yet they have pulled together to pool their efforts to educate and better the quality of life for themselves and the children in their care. They have established, with the help of a professional staff, an association that has helped to raise the image of family day care in the community and has made them more visible. By working together in WATCH, most members have developed

a sense of accountability for providing developmental services for children and their families. The women have begun by stating their positions, attempting to implement their words into deeds, and extending their ideas and learning. We plan to continue staff support, helping and participating in this self-help organization; we cannot just WATCH!

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